

**Community Development Block Grant
Public Hearing
Citywide Senior Center
January 30, 2002
Summary of Public Testimony**

Commissioners Present: Josiane Hudicourt Barnes, John Pratt, Mary Samp, Susan Strang, Hilma Unterberger, Lenore Preuser, Lorraine Thornhill

Staff Present: Jill Herold, Stephanie Ackert, Clo Delgado, Ted LaCrone

John Pratt opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, the Commissioners introduced themselves and then individuals were called up to the podium to give testimony. A summary of the testimony follows.

1. Bernadette Davidson-Child Care Resource Center

CCRC has been funded by CDBG funds since 1993. There has been a 71% increase in demand for infant/toddler care slots this past year, but supply cannot keep up with this demand. CCRC has a waitlist of 474 children. Cambridge does not have enough qualified childcare providers. An infant/toddler slot in Cambridge costs \$324 per week without subsidy; while school age care runs \$80 per week. State budget cuts have reduced funding levels for the Community Partnerships for Children and school age care. Private foundations are level funding CCRC programs this year.

2. Paul Plato-SCM Community Transportation

SCM's goal is to provide "safe, friendly and timely van service" to give people access to community resources. Forty drivers offer rides to medical appointments or shopping trips for the elderly or disabled. Riders seem more frail of health and their medical appointments seem further away from Cambridge.

3. Syrl Silberman-Cambridge Camping

Ms. Silberman spoke about the children she sees as being increasingly marginalized in our community. Many low income kids are isolated and fearful of taking risks that would expose them to the 'culture shock' of new experiences. She emphasized that a diversity of people and experiences is important for our children's future development.

4. Leslee Klein- Community Legal Services and Counseling Center

Ms. Klein highlighted human service themes/needs:

- Affordable housing
- Eviction prevention services/housing search
- Domestic violence services
- Health insurance
- Immigrants fearful of coming forward for services after 9/11/01
- Interpreter services
- Increase in human service worker wages
- The lowest wage workers affected by the current recession

5. Sylvia Greene-EvenStart

EvenStart is a collaboration between the Community Learning Center, Gately youth center, and the Title One office. Participating families experience the same pressures as previously mentioned. Many new immigrant families have a stay at home mother who is now forced to go outside the family for work. Ms. Greene sees challenges in preparing people for the workforce in job readiness and literacy. Many low income native English speakers are gone from Cambridge. Foreign born immigrants have replaced them in the EvenStart program.

6. Janet Murray- Food For Free

Food For Free distributes salvaged fresh produce to food pantries and meal programs. Ms. Murray chose to speak about a food stamp improvement coalition. Rosie's Place has convened this group and presented the State legislature with four suggestions to improve the utilization rate of food stamps. Massachusetts has one of the lowest utilization rates in the country.

7. Eve Sullivan- Parent's Forum

This network of parent activities focuses on family literacy, workshops and book/toy exchanges. Activities are open to any parent in Cambridge.

8. Dan O'Neil- Salvation Army

Dan spoke of the increase in homeless women at the drop in shelter who have to leave at 4:00 P.M. Where can they go with a lack of shelter space? When men are ready to leave to program, they are faced with a severe lack of housing. This is an incredible setback for their reintegration into society.

9. Rebecca Pries-Adolescent Consultation Services

Ms. Pries predicts more cuts in the Juvenile court system. Probation officers are already not being replaced as they retire. Without services in the community more youth will get committed to the Department of Youth Services. She also sees more youth accused of civil rights violations and a rise in racial tensions.

10. Jody Sammons-Community Dispute Settlement Center

The Center primarily works with neighbors needing to resolve a dispute. They need interpreter services and affordable information technology support. They have been impacted by state budget cuts.

11. Susan Ayers- The Guidance Center

Ms. Ayers described the range of services offered by the Guidance Center. There are pending lawsuits that may benefit the continuum of services. Is there a strategic plan for the community and the services offered in Cambridge? Could the City help coordinate between non-profits and corporations?

12. David Clark-Youth On Fire

Mr. Clark brought a youth who uses the drop in center located near Harvard Square. He spoke about the importance of their services which include: serving food, offering clothing, mental health screening, medical care, a safe drop in space and other youth development activities. There is a need to identify the hundreds of area youth that might participate in Youth On Fire. 450 youth have used the center since it's opening, about 34 people per day. They have 2 full time staff, 2 part time and one Americorp volunteer.

13. Miriam Lasher-Cambridge/Somerville Early Intervention

They offer infant/toddler service from pregnancy to the 3rd birthday. The Cambridge birth rate has not declined but Early Intervention sees the gap widening between affluent and low income Cambridge resident using their services. There is a crisis recruiting and maintaining staff. Staff earn 49% less than public school teachers.

14. Mary Quinn- The Women's Center

They provide a telephone helpline, many free support groups, a resource room, peer counseling and over the last 2 years have served as a daytime drop in for homeless women. These women are struggling with mental health/emotional troubles and not connecting to other resources. More women are coming to the center for help managing their finances. They give feedback to the staff that the Dept. of Transitional Assistance is not respectful towards their situation.

15. Liz Downey-Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers

There are roughly 20,000 Portuguese speakers in Massachusetts. MAPS connects people to community resources. They operate a range of programming from, elder services to tobacco control. There is a cultural norm of not seeking help outside the family.

16. Michael Delia-East End House

Mr. Delia outlined the concerns of the EEH and its immediate neighborhood. There is a need for more affordable child care, for early teen structured programming, emergency food resources, access to computers, transportation for elders and retention of childcare staff. He noted that 60 children are on the childcare waitlist and that there has been a 221% increase in the number of children whose families receive emergency food from their pantry.

17. Ashley Montero for Michelle Scott-Cambridge Sisters Program

Ashley Montero was a participant of the program which is a leadership program for 4th through 8th grade girls. This program operates in certain public schools and provides role models and structured activities afterschool.

18. Patricia Tellis Warren-Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services

Ms. Tellis Warren outlined the various services offered at CASLS. She noted two trends in their work. First, attorneys are spending a lot of time in court pursuing child support payments. It is very difficult to prove the income level of a self-employed parent. Second, domestic violence cases present multiple demands on staff time and create a sense of isolation for the women involved.

19. Sharon Kinsella-HomeStart

Ms. Kinsella noted that more people are moving from an “at risk” housing situation to homelessness. We need more prevention services, more help with money for up front moving costs and more access to substance abuse treatment.

20. Joe Finn-Shelter, Inc.

Shelter, Inc. started as a volunteer response to the homelessness crisis. He referenced a study showing that units affordable to people at 30% of the Area median income are the fastest disappearing housing units. An emergency response has become an acceptable housing niche. He suggested we keep leveraging the development of permanent housing projects with community agencies and supporting people to stay in their current housing situation.

21. Binyam Tamene-Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance

They provide cultural orientation, resettlement help, citizenship classes, interpretation, access to job training, ESL classes and other referral information. They also host a weekly radio program. Binyam has noticed a “negative focus” on immigrants since 9/11/01 and says that despite budget cuts, his agency is consistently busy with people seeking assistance.

22. Elaine DeRosa-Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee

Ms. DeRosa spoke about the rising income disparity in Massachusetts. We need more emergency food money and more fresh food. DTA is creating barriers to getting food stamps. We should support the 2 major housing bills at the state level.

23. Bethany Allen-Jam’nastics

Jam’nastics serves as an after school program for many kids. There is a need for more activities for middle school children. Programs must hold the youth’s interest.

24. Katya Fels-On The Rise

State budget cuts in substance abuse treatment will hurt women who use On The Rise. DTA does not offer comprehensive services for homeless women with children. Cambridge needs to identify more space for day time drop in centers for homeless women.

25. Bill Knowleton-CASPAR Albany Street Shelter

The trends with people who use Albany street are the same as last year. There is increasing IV drug use and more women guests showing up at the shelter. Many volunteers help out at Albany street, either in daily operation or as a learning experience.

26. George Davis-CASPAR youth services

How do we reach youth slipping through the cracks. There are more underage drug dealers appearing and more opiates being used. He notices more territoriality between Cambridge neighborhoods. The court diversion program doesn't serve many Cambridge youth-why not? Poor white children aren't fully utilizing services.